

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 0830

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MASS, KU, YO
SUBJECT: YUGOSLAV DEFMIN VISIT TO KUWAIT (FEB 5-9)

REF: KUWAIT 747.

1. AS NOTED REFTEL, GENERAL NIKOLA LJUBICIC, MEMBER OF THE YUGOSLAV FEDERAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (WHO WAS DESCRIBED IN THE KUWAITI PRESS AS "DEFENSE MINISTER" OF YUGOSLAVIA) VISITED KUWAIT FEB 5-9. PRESS REPORTS, WHICH WERE NUMEROUS AND FRIENDLY, INDICATED THAT LJUBICIC BROUGHT A NINE-MAN MILITARY DELEGATION WITH HIM, THAT HE HELD REPEATED DISCUSSIONS WITH KUWAITI INT/DEF MIN SHAIKH SA'AD AL-ABDULLAH AL-SABAH, AND THAT THE YUGOSLAV VISITOR MADE THE USUAL ROUND OF CALLS ON OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE CROWN PRINCE, AND VISITS TO MILITARY INSTALLATIONS. THIS VISIT RECIPROCATED THE 1976 TRIP TO BELGRADE BY THE KUWAITI INT/DEF MIN.

2. THE DISCUSSIONS WITH KUWAITI OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY INCLUDED A REVIEW OF MILITARY AIRFIELD CONSTRUCTION--THE YUGOSLAVS ARE BUILDING TWO FIELDS FOR THE KUWAITI AIR FORCE. CONSTRUCTION IS BEHIND SCHEDULE. THE MOST INTRIGUING ELEMENT OF THE BILATERAL TALKS, HOWEVER, INVOLVED WHAT THE

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PRESS CALLED THE "POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF ARMS" AND THE AND THE EXCHANGE OF "EXPERTISE" OR "MILITARY DELEGATIONS," SUBJECTS WHICH WERE DISCUSSED IN CLOSED SESSIONS ABOUT WHICH THE PRESS HAD NO DETAILS. THERE WERE ALSO SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION OF "NON-ALIGNED" BOILER PLATE BY BOTH KUWAITI AND YUGOSLAV MINISTERS, BUT THESE WERE SEIZED ONLY BRIEFLY.

3. COMMENT: THE LJUBICIC VISIT INTERESTED US MAINLY BECAUSE OF ITS POSSIBLE EFFECT ON KUWAIT-YUGOSLAV MILITARY RELATIONS, WHICH ARE NOW LIMITED TO AIRFIELD CONSTRUCTION AND KUWAITI OPERATION OF OBSOLECENT YUGOSLAV ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS, AS PART OF KUWAIT'S POTPOURRI OF OLD AND NEW WEAPONS IMPORTS. IF THE YUGOSLAVS ARE MAKING ANY GOOD QUALITY WEAPONS OF THE TYPES WHICH INTEREST KUWAIT (ASSAULT RIFLES, FOR THE 8,000-MAN ARMY, FOR EXAMPLE) THEN THERE IS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY OF ARMS SALES. IT IS KUWAITI POLICY TO DIVERSIFY POLITICALLY ITS EQUIPMENT SOURCES, AND IN THIS CASE THE APPARENTLY GOOD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEFMINs, AS WELL AS THE NON-ALIGNED AMBIENCE, WOULD SEEM TO FAVOR SALES. THE YUGOSLAV OFFERINGS WOULD HAVE TO BE TOP NOTCH, HOWEVER, SINCE KUWAIT CAN AFFORD THE VERY BEST.

4. WITHOUT NEW WEAPONS SALES WE WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW ANY MEANINGFUL "EXCHANGE OF EXPERTISE" MIGHT TAKE PLACE. THE KUWAITIS CERTAINLY HAVE NOTHING TO TEACH THE YUGOSLAV FORCES, AND WE ASSUME THAT WITH THEIR LIMITLESS FUNDS THEY CAN DO BETTER THAN HIRING YUGOSLAVIAN ADVISORS. MAESTRONE

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